

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands

Testimony

House Committee on Resources, Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands
Hearing on H.R. 3910, the Automobile National Heritage Area Authorization Act
Testimony of U.S. Representative Sander Levin (D-MI)
June 18, 1998

Mr. Chairman, thank you for inviting me to testify this morning in support of H.R. 3910, the Automobile National Heritage Area Authorization Act. I am proud to be an original cosponsor of this legislation.

Michiganians have a powerful affinity for automobiles. We've loved cars since the first production Model T was assembled at the Piquette Avenue Plant in Detroit in 1908. Ninety years later, Michigan's love affair with cars has not waned.

The evidence is indisputable. Earlier this year, some 791,000 people came down to Cobo Hall in Detroit to attend the 10th annual North American International Auto Show. That's more than three-quarters of a million people who were willing to pay \$8 dollar each to see the auto industry's new models and concept cars. The auto show generated between \$250 million and \$300 million in economic impact in Southeastern Michigan.

This affinity for automobiles is not confined to the late-model cars. The interest extends back into the past. More than one million people visit the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village in Dearborn every year. Further, auto enthusiasm is not confined to residents of Michigan. Twenty-five percent of the people who attended this year's auto show came from outside Michigan.

The ultimate proof that this fascination with cars is a national phenomenon is the fact that the radio program Car Talk is heard by more than 2.3 million listeners each week on over 415 National Public Radio stations across the country.

The automobile was not born in Detroit, but no other city in the world can lay claim to the title, "The Motor City." The history of the automotive industry in Michigan profoundly influenced and defined the development of the state. I don't want this history to be lost. Indeed, I want to leverage the history of the automobile for the continued benefit of Michigan and the rest of the nation. There's a story here that should be told.

H.R. 3910 would establish a five-corridor Automobile National Heritage Area in Michigan. These heritage corridors would contain some of the crown jewels of Michigan's automotive heritage. I'm especially pleased that my friend, John Dingell, included a heritage corridor that runs up Woodward Avenue. I say this not just because Woodward Avenue runs through my District. Mostly I am excited that this corridor includes the Highland Park Ford Plant. The plant was called the "Crystal Palace" when it opened in 1910 because of its 50,000 square feet of glass in its walls and ceilings. This was really the birthplace of the moving parts assembly line. It was the first time automobiles were mass produced.

Again, I am pleased to be a cosponsor of H.R. 3910. This bill has strong bipartisan support within the Michigan Delegation. For the very small investment called for in this legislation, we have an opportunity to preserve and harness the history of Michigan's automobile heritage.

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